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Memoirs & Verses

John H. Alexander.

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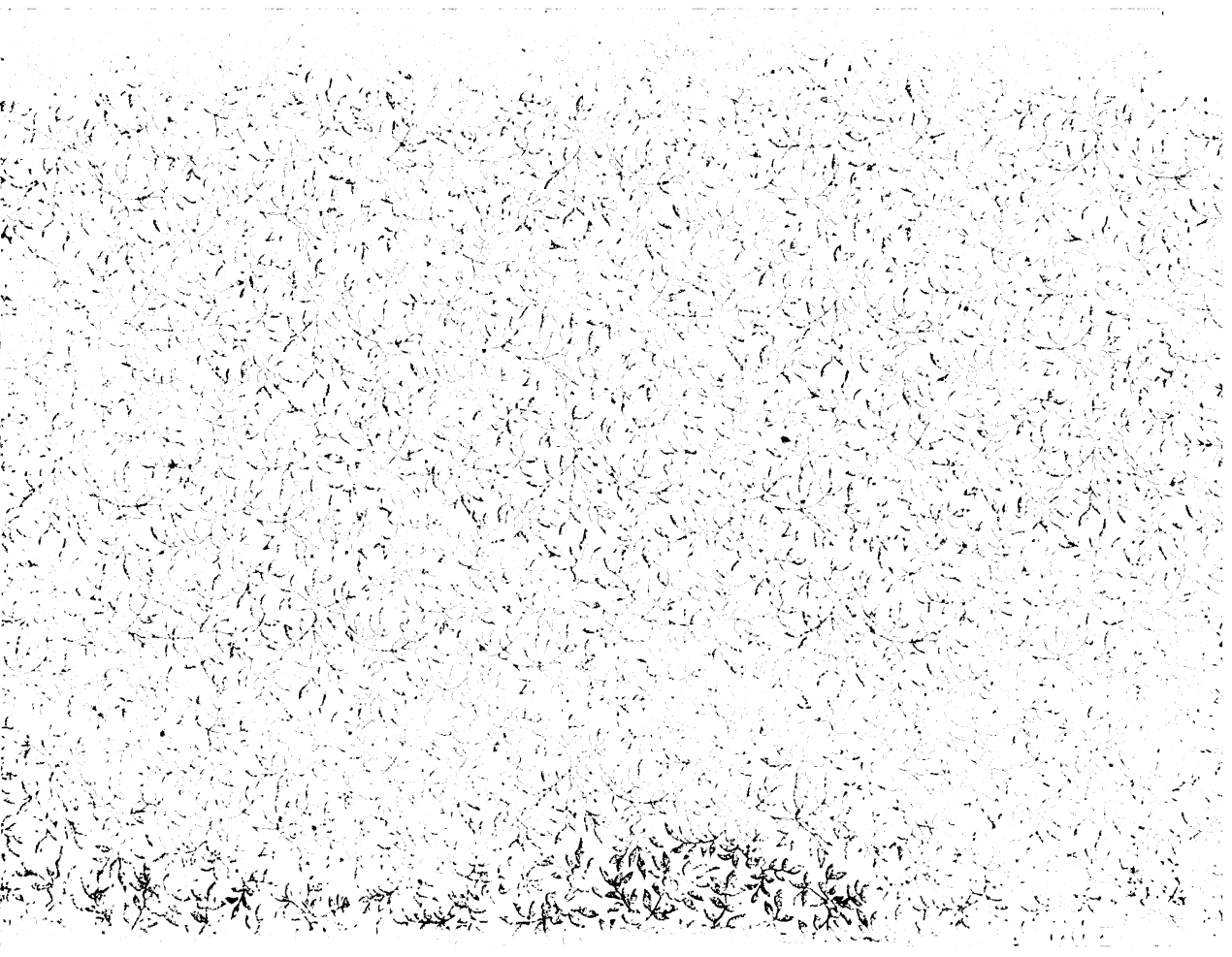

MEMOIRS AND VERSES

. . . of . . .

JOHN H. ALEXANDER

COMPILED BY

HIS CHILDREN

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA.

1893.

69774

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BIOGRAPHICAL.

[*From the "San Jose Daily Mercury," November 27, 1893.*]

JOHN HENDERSON ALEXANDER, after a lingering illness of about a year, quietly passed away, at 9:30 o'clock, yesterday morning, at his home, No. 313 South Tenth Street, surrounded by his family.

Last June he received a slight stroke of paralysis from which he never recovered; although at times he rallied, he has been gradually sinking since.

He was born September 25, 1826, on the French Broad River, Greene County, Tennessee. He was the third son of James Russell Alexander, who served as Judge of the Circuit Court for twelve years, in Franklin, Indiana. Mr. Alexander was raised on a farm, where he developed a strong physique. He had hoped to go to college, but his father's heavy losses in the panic of 1837 made it necessary for him to stay at home.

Though deprived of this boon, he was not disconcerted, and set about to acquire an education as best he could. He always carried a little pocket dictionary and would look up and study the meaning of any new word he might hear.

Moving to St. Louis in 1844, he entered the employ of the wholesale firm of J. H. Gay & Co. as office boy. Here, by close application to business, attending night school, and by using every means at his command to cultivate and develop himself, he was rapidly promoted.

In 1849 he caught the gold fever, and joining with a large party, he started across the plains for the golden State. After the usual experiences of such a journey, driving oxen by day, and fighting

off Indians by night, he arrived in the northern part of the State after having been six months on the road.

He went immediately to the mines, where he did quite well; but the work there completely broke down his health and he returned to St. Louis via the Isthmus route in 1850. He took his place in the old firm as book-keeper, where he remained until 1852, when the irresistible attractions of California again called him to this Coast.

He spent some time in the mines, but mostly in Sacramento and San Francisco, where he was in the employ of D. Lord & Co. as book-keeper and cashier. Here he remained until 1859, when he returned to St. Louis, again entering the employ of the old firm, now changed to Edward J. Gay & Co., serving them faithfully and well until 1880, when he resigned his position as book-keeper and cashier on account of failing health.

When in California before, he had heard of the Garden City, of its beauties and attractions, and believing a change would be a benefit, decided to make San Jose his home, and moved here Februrary 3, 1880.

He was secretary and cashier of the San Jose Independent Mill and Lumber Company for a number of years, resigning the 1st of last January on account of broken health.

Those who knew Mr. Alexander best loved him most. He had a large circle of friends who miss his genial countenance and pleasant smile. He always had a pleasant word for everyone he met. He was an unselfish man, ever striving to do something for some one, forgetting self in his eagerness to help others.

Mr. Alexander never entered political life, although many opportunities were offered, always preferring his family circle to positions of state. There he will be most missed. He was particularly kind and generous at home, ever studying how he might give something to, or do something for his loved ones; always kind and gentle, smiling and happy, never complaining; and his large heart made warm the home which his smile brightened.

A man of more than ordinary intelligence, of the strictest integrity and sterling worth, an old friend says, "Whatever John

Alexander says he will do, you can depend upon its being done, no matter what the cost."

A Christian man, having perfect faith and confidence in the Almighty to keep that which he had committed unto that great day; a Bible student, ever enjoying, more and more, the study of that great work; a man systematic in all details, with high ideals, noble motives and pure aspirations.

He will be missed by many loving friends; all who knew him revered him.

He leaves a widow and five children—Henry J., Mrs. Nellie Keith, William G., Howard A., and John E.

[*Editorial from the "San Jose Daily Mercury," of the same date.*]

By the death of John H. Alexander, San Jose loses a citizen whose personality was felt in many ways throughout the community. In business and in social circles his influence was widely and strongly impressed upon the city. A Southerner by birth and breeding, a Westerner by training, a California pioneer by experience, he was a fine example of the typical American. His nature developed under the diverse environments amid which he lived at different periods of his life into a character at once strong and tender, noble and lovable. He united the stately courtesy of the Old South with the freedom and ease of the West and the open-hearted, open-handed generosity and cordiality of California.

Having had an experience in life which developed to the fullest extent the powers and impulses of his many sided nature, Mr. Alexander was able to find points of mutual sympathy and interest with almost every one with whom he came in contact. Few men ever practiced more thoroughly than he the saying of Solomon: "He that hath friends must show himself friendly." The extent to which his friendliness was shown is attested by the wide spread circle that mourns his loss to-day, and shares the sorrow of his bereaved family. He will be remembered in many a heart and many

a household for the innumerable little acts of courtesy, of kindness and of help that made up the daily tenor of his life. He sought no political preferment, but he served the public welfare faithfully and efficiently in his private station. Every duty of a citizen, as well as of a friend, was fulfilled by him; and the esteem in which he was held passed beyond the circle of those who knew him personally and was felt by the whole community.

Memoirs of an Old Forty-niner.

HOW brief is the period from youth to old age,
And how swiftly speeds time when once we engage
In the battle of life, with its hopes and its fears,
And counting but mile-stones which mark off the years;
We leave all the green spots which make life so sweet,
And hardly look back till old-timers repeat
The story of those days, which radiantly shine
As a grand beacon light, our old forty-nine.

We pause ere we start on that wonderful trip,
Some crossing the plains and some by way of ship,
For Eldorado's fair land, the place of the gold,
Which vied even Ophir in its wealth yet untold;
And linger the while in fondest embraces
Of kindred and friends, whose dear loving faces
Told plainly that in us their hopes were all resting;
We bade them adieu—Then mother's fond blessing.

And then on our way, on that vast plain so grand,
With hope fully resting on that far distant land,
What more could we ask or heart more desire
As we gathered around our first night's camp-fire?

Yet mindful of danger so common to all,
We then breathed a prayer that naught might befall,
And there 'neath the stars, with the moon shining bright,
We pledged to each other our faith on that night.

How light were our hearts; how ready to embrace
Ev'ry chance for a hunt or a buffalo chase!
And the grand scenes and sports, so new and so rare,
Filled our eyes with wonder and kept off dull care.
But the scene soon changes, when sound sleepers start
In that dire confusion, which filled ev'ry heart
With horror and dread, as the wild Indian yell
Broke silence that night, like a fearful death knell.

But to scalp-knife or arrow we were not fated,
Yet troubles in camp-life were oft unabated;
And the long weary months of toil and privation,
Oft mingled with hunger—almost to starvation—
May tell their own story of those perilous times
When pioneers sought California's gold mines.
Who then would not honor, in sweet minstrel strain,
The deeds of those heroes—by sea and by plain?

But who in true colors, will e'er paint those scenes
Which moved ev'ry heart, who had courage and means
To reach that far country! Then, gold was the rage
Which guided the footsteps of youth and old age;
And while multitudes chose to sail o'er the main,
Our journey was made on an overland train.
Thus the seas and the plains, all working with fate,
Soon changed vast wilds into a flourishing State.

And who can e'er fathom the deep raging sea,
Which holds many comrades of both you and me,
And who will e'er find the rude mounds often made
In silence and sorrow o'er the friends we there laid
In solitude's grave on that vast dreary plain,
Where none may strew flowers nor friends come again!
Then dream not that roses filled quite all the way
Which led forty-niners in that early day.

How few now remain of that wonderful throng,
Which first wielded pick and filled mountain with song,
Who faced every danger with hearts brave and true,
To hand down a blessing for me and for you.
And many filled rude graves in those days of yore,
Where no mother might weep, no friend might deplore,
Who, then, will withold a garland or tear,
As we make a mound over an old pioneer?

May 1, 1891.

The Littleness of Man.

TELL me, why should mortals boast,
Or why should man be proud?
Can he redeem a soul that's lost,
Or carry it beyond the cloud?

Can he, at will, give length of days,
And satisfy the longing heart—
Perfection show in all his ways,
And truth in every part?

Can he, by wisdom of his own,
Rule this great world of ours,
And from his self-created throne
Bring bounty and blooming flowers?

We doubt if man, in his estate,
Can e'ér the secret find,
To guide the spheres, anew create,
Or satisfy the mind.

Then, say, why should mortals boast,
Or why should man be proud?
He enters life a worm of dust,
And leaves with but a shroud.

September, 1889.

To My Wife.

IF we would sing full meed of praise
Of one whose virtues claim our love,
We'd touch our harps, while anthems raise
In chorus to the choirs above.

With deepest love, in minstrel strain,
We'd join the hosts of seraphs bright—
In chanting songs, in sweet refrain,
In tribute to our household light.

We'd sing of days now long since past,
When hopes were young and hearts were free,
And when her radiance ever cast
The light of hope and joy for me.

And then we'd sing of after years—
When home was chief of all our joys;
When crowning work, nor doubts, nor fears,
She gave to home her girl and boys.

We'd gather garlands of rarest kind
And strew them in her pathway now;
Her deeds of love have ever twined
Our hearts with that which wreathes her brow.

No more may human lips bestow,
Nor angel voice be-taught to sing,
That we—in accents whispered low—
The tribute of our hearts now bring.

We bow in love to that fair shrine
Where hand and heart, and life, and love,
Like gentle dew doth e'er refine
And fit us for our home above.

March 25, 1891.

Watching Our Boy.

WE watched him and listened
To that little voice,
Which made papa's heart glad,
And mamma's rejoice.

We watched him in babyhood,
With the tenderest care,
And gave him of caresses
A bountiful share.

We watched him in childhood,
When Summers were bright,
When play-house and drum filled
His heart with delight.

We watched him in boyhood,
Through bright sunny hours,
When his dreams were delight—
His pathway but flowers.

We have watched him in youth,
When life was all hope—
When the future was pictured
As a bright sunny slope.

We watched him, and, watching,
His school-days have ended;
We find baby and boy
Into manhood have blended.

Yes, we watched him all through,
Since his first rising sun;
We are watching him now,
At twenty and one.

And thus while still watching,
Our life here gives o'er,
We'll be waiting for him
On the golden shore.

February 28, 1888.

To Henry.

IN life's early morning, when hope was so high,
With the cares and the toils of life yet unknown,
While the glory of youth was then passing by,
Visions were created of a world all your own.
The enchantment of scenes which then fill'd the eye,
Gave lustre to pleasure and banished all fears,
With your pathway gilded by an unclouded sky
The joy of your heart was unmingled with tears.

Thus the spring-time of life, with its first golden ray,
And the joy of those hours which childhood then knew,
Like the pure gems of ocean, will ne'er fade away,
And fond recollection will oft welcome it, too.
And we breathe in soft accents an unfeigned prayer
That fate may deal kindly,—while marking off time,—
With heaven's best blessing bestowed in full share,
While the enchantments of youth may ever be thine.

June 12, 1891.

Birthday Greeting.

To Nellie.

We oft' turn to days in our annals of time,
When our pathway was strewed with garlands so fair;
And gather sweet memories, which fondly entwine
Our hearts around dear ones, of our own loving care.
Thus we hail with delight the return of this day,
And welcome it ever, a bright little spot
Which shines like the gleam of a bright, golden ray
On the years that have gone, though never forgot.

Then touch in soft strains the harp or the lyre;
Let us sing joyful songs in sweet minstrel lay—
Awaken the chords which a soul may inspire,
As we give fond greeting to our daughter's birthday:
For who was the star of our household, in years
When life was so radiant with hope and with joy,
And who cheered our lives, in its doubts and its fears,
And wove that fond fabric which naught can destroy.

Though years in life's journey have passed from our view,
With young life's enchantments now fading away;
Yet the bright glow of youth still lingers with you,
While fond recollections return with this day.
Thus we glean from the past bright relics of joy,
And revel in pleasures which the hours then knew,
While our hearts and our hands we all would employ
In off'ring love's greeting, with a blessing for you.

Where gather we fragrance, to cheer autumn days,
But the home of our youth, when affections were new;
The flowers, though breathing sun's life-giving rays,
Return for their fragrance to morning's fresh dew.
Thus affections which kindled in life's early youth,
Glow brighter with age, and lend charms evermore,
And the heart thus entwined with infancy's truth,
Already has foretaste of heaven's bright shore.

September 24, 1891.

On Viewing the Ocean.

ROLL on, mighty billows, O thou raging deep,
But within thy limits be ever confined;
And let murmurs their vigils continue to keep,
Thus obeying behests which thy Maker designed.
For who gave thee motion and called forth the sounds
That lull to repose whom thy waters now claim;
And who formed the seas and then set the bounds
Over seas and the land with unerring aim?

'Twas thy Maker and God, whose absolute might
Ever rules in eternity's infinite space,
And whose wondrous decree has sent forth the light
To reflect back the glory of creation's fair face.
But, when the trumpet notes of Gabriel sound—
To once more unite whom their Maker adore,
And Omnipotent's works shall all have been crowned,
Then, the voice of thy waves shall be heard nevermore.

Seabright, July 25, 1892.

Carrying the Gospel Around the World.

He worked in the vineyard of the true vine,
Carrying its broad borders into every clime,
Making ready for harvesting in every place,
In every hamlet, and among every race.
Nor stayed he the work, nor doubt nor fear,
Till the westwardly worker in the east did appear.
On speed the work, thus wisely begun,
Nor stay in its progress till harvesting's done.

To Will and Sallie.

HOW swiftly speeds the flight of time;
How little do we heed its flight;
No sooner the sun begins to shine
Then mark the dial for approaching night.

No sooner the babes that gave us joy,
Had ceased to kneel at a mother's knee,
Than we find the full-grown girl and boy,
Crossing the line of their twenty and three.

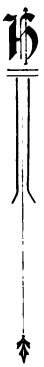
Well may we pause in time's swift flight,
And give due heed to the present occasion;
For one goes forth, single-handed, to fight,
While the other is of double persuasion.

What shall we gather from passing events,
Blended so closely with our hopes and our joys?
How fill the measure, that evil prevents—
Always best serving our girls and our boys?

Train them early, all vices to shun,
Point out plainly the source of all truth.
Then trustfully rest, work being all done;
They cannot forget the teachings of youth.

February 25, 1890.

To Howard.



HOW swiftly the years have come and have gone,
Leaving the footprints which ever remind us
That this mortal life, however 'tis run,
Very soon at its autumn shall find us.

From youth to old age is a song oft' sung—
The heroes are those whose heads wear the gray;
But the theme of my song—just twenty and one—
Now battles with life in youth's bright array.

No longer the babe, so fondly caressed,
No longer the child—our pride and our joy—
But firm in his manhood, with duty impressed,
He is our loved son, our own darling boy.

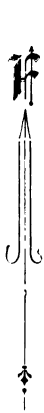
Then let us so blend with life's autumn time
The garlands we gather in youth's early days,
Thus filling our present with all that's sublime,
As we journey from dawn to sun-setting rays.

Thus time in its way will weave us a web
Of fabric so strong 'twill never decay,
And surround us by love, in life at its ebb,
With visions of joy like hope's brightest ray.

February 2, 1891.

True Greatness.

To John.



FROM creation's first dawn, down the vista of years,
We trace the same stream which flows on to the end:
Unrestful mankind, with new hopes and new fears,
All joined in the way to which mortals all tend;
All groping in darkness—in mystified ways—
All searching for light, and perfection's fair goal;
But the light, now breaking, though in faint, feeble rays,
Will satisfy longings which are born in the soul.

Thus searching for wisdom, in the mazes of time,
We gather up fragments from each little web,
Which weave into fabric that makes life sublime
And radiates the soul in life at its ebb.
Thus we glean from the past bright relics of truth,
Which fall like the sunbeams from unclouded skies,
And thus kindles the hope which animates youth
And reveals to mankind where true greatness lies.

Whence spring the great forests—from seeds sown in earth;
What moulds the great mind, but infancy's truth;
What advancement in man he owes not to birth,
And the training of thought, while yet in his youth.

The vessel is moulded while yet in the clay ;
The plant while yet tender is nourished with care,
While the gem of true life, that fades not away,
Is born in the soul, and true greatness is there.

No human ambition, though it echo with fame,
Can stop life's decay or call back fleeting breath ;
No achievement of man, of whatever name,
Can revive the dull ear that sleeps in cold death.
But true greatness will live, and the requiem sing
Over frailties and follies of human events
When they've crumbled to dust, and then it will bring,
While approaching its God, its own recompense.

June 24, 1891.

Greetings on Her Wedding Day.

To May.

WHEN the angels were gathering garlands fair,
And strewing them upon the way,
They found a bud of rarest hues,
And called it the Queen of May.

Then winging their way on pinions bright,
They lingered full many an hour,
But coming again they find a rose—
Full-blown—crowning the nuptial bower.

The rose may blush its rarest hues
And all the flowers be bright,
The angels may sing their gladdest songs
And make all the world delight;

Yet naught a fairer scene could paint,
What'er of song or bright array,
Than the nuptial vows, just sealed in love,
That made one of Frank and May.

May 14, 1890.

To Will and Edith.

MAY their love for each other ever be
As broad as the ocean,
As deep as the sea,
As lasting as time,
And as strong as the ties which have bound them together;
While their lives may ever be
Like new hope begun—
Disappointment none—
Till life's work is done;
Then, with joy in their hearts, may they cross the last river.

December 23, 1890.

Wedding Bells.

To Will and Edith.

WE oft' gather fragrance from days that are past,
And twine it about us, thus letting it cast
The sunlight of gladness on time's present hour.
But pale is the past, in this our new joy—
The fulfillment of hope—complete in our boy,
While plighting his faith 'neath the nuptial bower.

Sweet memories oft' cheer us, in life's autumn days,
And shine on our path like sun-setting rays,
Thus sweetening the present with the nectar of life;
But our ever-fond hearts now fill with delight,
While the angels are tuning their harps, ever bright,
To join in a welcome to our boy and his wife.

With truest good wishes, none better could be
Than adding God's blessing, we ask it for thee,
In fullness of measure on all that is given;
With full length of years—while none that are dark—
And the angel of mercy to guide on thy bark
Through all peaceful ways, then moor it in heaven.

December 23, 1890.

Why Not Rest?

I SOUGHT for a flower,
On a bright summer's day,
But found them all faded
And gone to decay.

I said to the fairy
Who sat in the bower,
"They must have all wilted
For want of a shower."

She smiled as she said,
Without hesitation,
"'Tis no lack of a shower,
But on a vacation;

"For rest, you must know,
Is what we all need,
And rest for the flower
Only ripens the seed.

"Then, when seed thus gathered,
After full resting hours,
Gives bounteously of harvest
With beautiful flowers.

"Then learn from the flowers,
Whom Nature gives rest
That counting-house toiling
Is not always best.

"But, with business and care,
Give rest a small place ;
Thus ripening the full years
Of our allotted space.

To make one's life fruitful,
'Tis fully confess'd,
Can only be made so—
By taking some rest."

August 12, 1890.

Reminiscence.

HOW oft' in the stillness of solitude's hours
Fond memory will turn from these happy bowers
To the scenes of the past, to those good old days
When life was as golden as sun-setting rays,
When each day came manteled with newly-born hope
And the future was pictured a beautiful slope:
Thus revels our memory, we then live anew
As the rose takes new life from fresh morning dew.

Those scenes were the home of our earliest joys,
Which gave birth to new hope and sheltered our boys;
'Twas there we all gathered around the hearth-stone
And mingled our joys and made them but one;
And there, far away from dull business and care,
While Grandpa sat watching in his easy arm-chair,
We all joined the children in their romps and their plays
And made those old times the happiest of days.

There stood the hawthorn in the lawn just below,
And there were the maples, all standing in row,
The elms in the meadow, the oaks o'er the way,
The trees 'round the circle, where the boys used to play,

With the orchard and garden and every lov'd spot
Now sacred in memory, will ne'er be forgot:
For this was the home of our once loving care,
And, whate'er be our fate, our hearts will be there.

Who would not, then, be in the happiest mood,
As memory thus turns to our home at "Gay-wood"?
With our kindred so many, and friends many more,
Each vying the other as they laid at that door
Some tribute of honor, some token of love,
Which came like the sunbeam that falls from above,
Ever brightening the home we once used to share
With Grandpa, as he sat in his old arm-chair.

'Twas there we oft watched with joy and with pride,
Our children and Grandpa as they started to ride.
They always drove "Barney," so trusty and true,
And who then could object or make much ado,
For Grandpa and our boys full well understood
Each lane and each by-way, each tree in the wood,
And while they oft' lingered full long on the plain,
Yet long before nightfall they found home again.

And then came those days when school was attended,
When ev'ry young hope and new pleasure were blended;
While each day came clothed in a mantle of joy,
Which brought life's best pleasure without its alloy.
Thus, fair were the scenes which surrounded that home,
But, dreams they are now, for long since they have gone
To that beautiful past, and no longer can fill
The void in our hearts, which linger there still.

Then, while we pass those scenes with uncovered head,
We pause at the threshold and there lightly tread,
As we pay a last tribute to our kindred and friend
Whose greatness of soul and rare virtues did blend
Into completeness of manhood, as he then stood
The head of the household at dear old "Gay-wood."
We laid him away gently as the falling of dew,
While the heart of his friend was buried there too.

Though fate has decreed that our autumn of days
Should be spent far away from those pleasant ways,
Yet our dreams of the past oft' bring to us joy
Which naught can efface nor can time e'er destroy,
Which come to us whispering in such joyful tongue,
They almost persuade us we are again young;
Thus the life we now live, like song's sweet refrain,
Is the joy of those days lived over again.

San Jose, Cal., March 25, 1891.

To Edith.

IF I could fly to loftiest height,
And pluck a wreath of glory thence,
I'd bless the wings that gave me flight,
And touch my lyre in recompense.

I'd place that wreath of tribute, where
A crown of pearls may ne'er be worn;
But where the heart has fullest share,
In making gems that most adorn.

I'd sing the songs that angels sung,
When light first dawned upon the earth—
When heaven's bright gate wide open swung,
In welcome to our daughter's birth.

With love I'd voice, in minstrel strain,
The welcome which we give so free,
While angels join in sweet refrain
To waft it back in blessing thee.

Thus would we sing, in tones of love,
Of one whose heart's so closely twined
With ours, in life; while we above
One common home shall hope to find.

June 16, 1891.

To Laura.

HOW beautiful in life, with its hopes and its fears,
To find in our pathway that odor of joy
Which fills us with pleasure, while affection appears
And drives away sorrow ere grief can destroy.
Thus, life's gloomy shadows are drawn from our view,
And the radiance of joy is shed all about,
While enchantments that lure us all pass in review
And call the true spirit of fragrancy out.

Unwritten the story of full many a maid,
Whose heart and whose hands have smoothed thorny ways,
But the fountain of sorrow is already stayed,
When the light of affection sends out its pure rays.
May the sleep of such maiden be guarded by love,
And the rosiest down be placed on her bed,
While the angel of mercy, in recording above,
May vouchsafe a blessing to fall on her head.

Whence spring the emotions that quicken our love?
'Tis a sorrow that's soothed or a tear wiped away;
Whence arise the bright gleams of home that's above?
'Tis the light of affection in hope's purest ray.
'Tis not to embellish or illumine thy way
With gems of creation no heart can enshrine,
But to point out the jewel that fades not away—
Affection's bright luster—that luster is thine.

Aug. 20, 1891.

Another Mile-stone.

To Will and Sallie.

. . . ✱ . . .

ANOTHER mile-stone is marked on the way—
Another year came and has passed away—
Leaving the footprints that say to us, gone!
Gone to that past which ne'er can awaken
The slumbers of time, which life has forsaken,
Leaving the imprint that work has been done.

Thus time, as it moves in manifold years,
Bringing new hopes, new doubts and new fears,
Ever moves onward, nor looks it behind;
Thus man, as he moves in the mystery of life,
Ever looks forward—while engaged in its strife—
Into the future, his chief joy to find.

Then let us all learn, as time thus moves on,
That all this life's work has only begun
That which is measured by eternal love.
Then may we all use each moment of time,
Leaving such mile-stones as will ever shine
Like gems in the coronets that crown us above.

February 25, 1891.

A Request.

WHEN time would call me away to rest,
Let it be in our old home, so dear;
Let it be when I am by loved ones caressed,
When affection will drive away every fear.

And bury me not in the cold, cold ground,
While for life, hope still lingers to save.
Wait till my spirit has left its frame,
And has gone to the God who gave.

Then, when you would lay me out of sight,
Let it be in some green little spot
Where the birds may sing their sweetest songs--
The wild flowers grow, and forget me not.

Then make no heraldry of grief or show;
Let my mourners be those whom I love,
Nor grieve as those who have no hope,
For we know we'll be united above.

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